Korean and Vietnam Wars Primary Sources

**Letter from Bob Spiroff to his wife (Korean War)**

**“Tuesday morn, October 17, 1950, North Korea**

My Dear Wonderful Wife - Good morning Darling.  Here it is another day without you, but nevertheless you're forever on my mind.  Yesterday I received my second letter from you.  The one with Al's letter in it.  You'll never know how happy your letter made me Darling.  It was just like giving me new life and strength to carry on.

I don't know if you got my letter which I wrote you Saturday or not.  The one I told you that we were moving out to make an attack.  Well, we did Honey--on Sunday.  We took two villages and a high mountain.  Cassie darling, you'll never be able to understand how horrible it was.  We fought all day and advanced about two miles.  And we paid for it Honey, in life and blood.  I don't think I'll ever be the same again after that….  The resistance we got from the enemy was more than Headquarters expected.  And if we didn't have the tanks with us, we never would have made it...We were all pinned down to the ground by the fire from the hill.  I lay down on the side of the road and pretended I was dead.  Bullets whizzing all around me…I dug a trench as I was laying down with my bare hands and a piece of rock.  I dug it deep enough to get my head and neck into it.  Pretty soon our tanks arrived and opened up, which knocked out the enemy position and forced the rest to run away….

I am writing this letter on some captured enemy paper.  At the present time, I have twelve men with me and am guarding 80 enemy prisoners.  My company is further up front holding the high ground.  We are back here at Battalion Headquarters.  It's a break for us Darling and I hope it lasts for a while.  Don't worry about me Dear.  For as far as soldiering goes and maneuvering around the enemy, I can well take care of myself….”

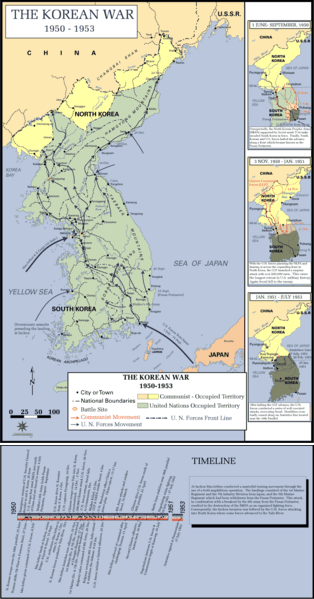
<http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_spiroff.htm>

Marine Walking Through the Snow (Korean War)



[http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action/ShowFullRecordLinked?tab=showFullDescriptionTabs/details&%24searchId=2&%24showFullDescriptionTabs.selectedPaneId=digital&%24digiDetailPageModel.currentPage=0&%24digiViewModel.detailId=1&%24partitionIndex=0&%24digiSummaryPageModel.targetModel=true&%24submitId=1&%24digiViewModel.name=digiViewModel&%24resultsDetailPageModel.search=true&%24digiDetailPageModel.resultPageModel=true&%24resultsDetailPageModel.currentPage=0&%24resultsDetailPageModel.pageSize=1&%24sort=RELEVANCE\_ASC&%24highlight=false](http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action/ShowFullRecordLinked?tab=showFullDescriptionTabs/details&%24searchId=2&%24showFullDescriptionTabs.selectedPaneId=digital&%24digiDetailPageModel.currentPage=0&%24digiViewModel.detailId=1&%24partitionIndex=0&%24digiSumma)

**Korean War Map**



<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korea-overview.gif>

## Truman Orders U.S. Air, Navy Units To Fight In Aid Of Korea; U.N. Council Supports Him; Our Fliers In Action; Fleet Guards Formosa

##### By ANTHONY LEVIERO

Washington, June 27--President Truman announced today that he had ordered United States air and naval forces to fight with South Korea's Army. He said this country took the action, as a member of the United Nations, to enforce the cease-fire order issued by the Security Council Sunday night.

Then acting independently of the United Nations, in a move to assure this country's security, the Chief Executive ordered Vice Admiral Arthur D. Struble to form a protective cordon around Formosa to prevent its invasion by Communist Chinese forces.

Along with these fateful decisions, Mr. Truman also ordered an increase of our forces based in the Philippine Republic, as well as more speedy military assistance to that country and to the French and Vietnam forces that are fighting Communist armies in Indo-China.

After he had started these moves that might mean a decided turn toward peace or a general war, the President sent Ambassador Alan G. Kirk to the Russian Foreign Office in Moscow to request the Soviet Union to use its good offices to end the hostilities. This was an obvious proffer of an opportunity for Russia to end the crisis before her own forces might get involved. In the capital this was regarded as being at once a possible face-saving device for Russia in a showdown crisis and a feeler to determine her intentions.

The decisions amounted to a showdown in the "cold war" with Russia, in which this country has at last decided to begin shooting in a limited area. Yet all the decisions followed a carefully worked out formula of action within the framework of the United Nations, as well as unilateral moves that avoided any direct provocation of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Truman based the decision to fight for the South Koreans entirely on the Security Council resolution which called upon all members of the United Nations to help carry it out. And at the Pentagon it was explained that our air and naval forces would fight only below the Thirty-eighth Parallel line that divides South Korea from the Russian- sponsored North Korea.

"The Security Council called upon all members of the United Nations to render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution," Mr. Truman stated. "In these circumstances I have ordered United States air and sea forces to give the Korean Government troops cover and support."

…Today the view was that American air and naval forces could assure overwhelming superiority to South Korea and bring victory, unless, of course, Russia similarly aided North Korea….

[**http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0627.html#article**](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0627.html#article)

Letter Home from Vietnam

|  |
| --- |
| Dear Maxie,  What a horrible day it’s been. It’s rained almost all day and it’s been terribly gloomy. The lights have been going on and off all night. A “Touch of Blue” was on the outdoor movie tonight and the film kept breaking every five minutes. Just when it started getting good. I left about 2/3’s of the way through when it started raining again. Seems like a good movie, have you seen it? Also didn’t get any mail here today – none at all. A letter from you would have brightened my day so much. Can’t tell you how much good receiving a letter from you does. Please write me as often as possible, and I’ll write you daily. I miss you very much, and knowing that you’re still there loving me like I love you keeps me going over here.  Our company has a guy missing – he’s been missing for a couple of days and they don’t know if he’s alive or not. He’s probably not alive, but there is a chance. I think it’d be harder on his family to know that he’s missing and not know what happened to him than to have his body. We’re writing up a letter to send to his family now – it’s not easy. I have typed a letter to send to the guys’ families who were killed in action. What can you say to someone whose son or husband is missing and we don’t know what happened to him?  Larry says hello. He’s the Florida boy who I had write Kath. Know any eligible, decent girls who would be interested in writing a guy over here? His name is Larry Houston, a PFC, same address as mine. He’s 6’4” tall, 195 lbs and from Florida and a pretty decent guy…. |

|  |
| --- |
| Sure do miss you, hon. This being here and you there just doesn’t cut it. I’ll never leave you again, never. After we get together, nothing will part us. I promise, and I’ll never stop loving you so don’t worry about that. It’ll never happen. You’ll be mine forever. I love you.    Yours,  Gary |

<http://dearmaxie.com/day24.html>

**Excerpts: President Lyndon B. Johnson, “Speech on Vietnam” (September 29, 1967)**

“There are passionate convictions about the wisest course for our Nation to follow [in Vietnam]. There are many sincere and patriotic Americans who harbor doubts about sustaining the commitment that three Presidents and a half a million of our young men have made.   
  
Doubt and debate are enlarged because the problems of Vietnam are quite complex. They are a mixture of political turmoil—of poverty—of religious and factional strife—of ancient servitude and modern longing for freedom. Vietnam is all of these things. Vietnam is also the scene of a powerful aggression that is spurred by an appetite for conquest.   
  
It is the arena where Communist expansionism is most aggressively at work in the world today—where it is crossing international frontiers in violation of international agreements; where it is killing and kidnaping; where it is ruthlessly attempting to bend free people to its will.   
  
Into this mixture of subversion and war, of terror and hope, America has entered….Why? Why should three Presidents and the elected representatives of our people have chosen to defend this Asian nation more than 10,000 miles from American shores?   
  
We cherish freedom—yes. We cherish self-determination for all people—yes. We abhor the political murder of any state by another…And for 27 years…we have sought to strengthen free people against domination by aggressive foreign powers. But the key to all that we have done is really our own security. At times of crisis—before asking Americans to fight and die to resist aggression in a foreign land—every American President has finally had to answer this question:   
  
Is the aggression a threat—not only to the immediate victim--but to the United States of America and to the peace and security of the entire world of which we in America are a very vital part?

….Those who tell us now that we should abandon our commitment—that securing South Vietnam from armed domination is not worth the price…must also answer this question. And the test they must meet is this: What would be the consequences of letting armed aggression against South Vietnam succeed? What would follow in the time ahead?

….I cannot tell you tonight as your President-with certainty—that a Communist conquest of South Vietnam would be followed by a Communist conquest of Southeast Asia.…  
But all that we have learned in this tragic century strongly suggests to me that it would be so. As President of the United States, I am not prepared to gamble on the chance that it is not so. I am not prepared to risk the security—indeed, the survival—of this American Nation on mere hope and wishful thinking. I am convinced that by seeing this struggle through now, we are greatly reducing the chances of a much larger war—perhaps a nuclear war. I would rather stand in Vietnam, in our time, and by meeting this danger now, and facing up to it, thereby reduce the danger for our children and for our grandchildren.

<http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/4041>

**EXCERPTS: John Kerry, “Vietnam Vets Against the War” 1971**

“…Each day to facilitate the process by which the United States washes her hands of Vietnam someone has to give up his life so that the United States doesn't have to admit something that the entire world already knows, so that we can't say that we have made a mistake. Someone has to die so that President Nixon won't be, and these are his words, "the first President to lose a war."

We are asking Americans to think about that because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?....We are here in Washington to say that the problem of this war is not just a question of war and diplomacy. It is part and parcel of everything that we are trying as human beings to communicate to people in this country…

We are here to ask, and we are here to ask vehemently, where are the leaders of our country? Where is the leadership? We're here to ask where are McNamara, Rostow, Bundy, Gilpatrick, and so many others? Where are they now that we, the men they sent off to war, have returned? These are the commanders who have deserted their troops. And there is no more serious crime in the laws of war. The Army says they never leave their wounded. The marines say they never even leave their dead. These men have left all the casualties and retreated behind a pious shield of public rectitude....

We wish that a merciful God could wipe away our own memories of that service as easily as this administration has wiped away their memories of us. But all that they have done and all that they can do by this denial is to make more clear than ever our own determination to undertake one last mission - to search out and destroy the last vestige of this barbaric war, to pacify our own hearts, to conquer the hate and fear that have driven this country these last ten years and more. And more. And so when thirty years from now our brothers go down the street without a leg, without an arm, or a face, and small boys ask why, we will be able to say "Vietnam" and not mean a desert, not a filthy obscene memory, but mean instead where America finally turned and where soldiers like us helped it in the turning.”

<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/913184/posts>

**Ed Littlefield Vietnam Journals, 1966-67**

“December 22, 1965  
I had been persuaded by a Gunnery Sergeant, a Marine Corps Recruiter in Panama City, Florida, to enlist in the Marines. I was seventeen. I had been duped with the promise of getting an education through a “guarantee” of an aviation occupational specialty. Coming from a family where there was little or no hope of bettering myself because of no guidance or resources to draw from, I quit high school and joined. My intention was to better my lot in life and to gain an education. I was a positive, adventurous, eager young man. To me all things were possible!  
  
From this point forward I became known as Littlefield. No more Ed or Robert, just Littlefield. I guess so as not to become attached to anyone personally. And it remained so until I left the service 3 ½ years later.  
  
I completed boot camp at Paris Island, South Carolina (platoon 2033), moved on through infantry training at Camp Lejune, North Carolina.

“November 29th, 1966  
I stepped off the ship at DaNang Beach, Vietnam and walked down the gang plank. I remember thinking how odd it seemed for me to be around such a foreign people and place. I wondered how it was that I had gotten there. I was a boy of only eighteen and I was trim, eager and a little scared. We had finally arrived after much anxiety and anticipation. I was a Marine. I had no idea what that really meant and for what was in store for me and my partners in the next few months. Nobody really understood, we just found ourselves THERE! The after effects would have an abiding influence on our lives.

…Once on the scene, like everybody else, I plunged into the routines of the day, slogging through the rice paddies and jungle, fighting the bugs and leeches while succumbing to the heavy air as it hung all around and we were forced to breathe. Life was miserable! The surroundings were a claustrophobic offensive jungle with elephant grass 20 feet high and a suffocating temperature of upwards of 120 degrees…

Many nights we slept in our clothes, unable to take a proper bath or even to sleep. This kind of war was different than for which we had trained. Often we wondered if the VC were even out there. You never saw them. And yet he would plague us with booby traps all around or land mines, rockets or mortars. All of our engagements seemed without purpose. It was just us against them. One day we would take territory while the next day we would give it up. The body count and the casualties were the only real way we could keep score….”

<http://community.discovery.com/eve/forums/a/tpc/f/8081928318/m/6781979468>

**Vietnam War Photos**

****

[**http://www.archives.gov/research/military/marine-corps/command-chronology.html**](http://www.archives.gov/research/military/marine-corps/command-chronology.html)

**Vietnam War Photos**

****

[**http://gallery.pictopia.com/archives/gallery/95345/photo/8611520/?o=12**](http://gallery.pictopia.com/archives/gallery/95345/photo/8611520/?o=12)

**Vietnam Protests**

****

[**http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/picturing\_the\_century/century/century\_img86.html**](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/picturing_the_century/century/century_img86.html)

**Evacuation From Saigon Tumultuous at the End**

**By George Esper   
Special to The New York Times**

Saigon, South Vietnam, Wednesday, April 30--With American fighter planes flying cover and marines standing guard on the ground, Americans left Saigon yesterday by helicopter after fighting off throngs of Vietnamese civilians who tried to go along.

Eighty-one helicopters from carriers in the South China Sea landed at Tan Son Nhut airport and on roofs at the United States Embassy compound to pick up most of the approximately 1,000 remaining Americans and several thousand Vietnamese.

But large groups of other Vietnamese clawed their way up the 10-foot wall of the embassy compound in desperate attempts to escape approaching Communist troops. United States marines and civilians used pistol and rifle butts to dislodge them.

…The final stage of the evacuation, which stretched over 19 hours, brought to an end an American involvement in Vietnam that cost more than 50,000 lives and $150-billion. Four marines died during the final evacuation--two early yesterday as a result of a bombardment of Tan Son Nhut airport, two later when their helicopter plunged into the South China Sea.

While most Americans were pulling out, some newsmen and missionaries chose to remain.

…One of the last civilians to leave was Ambassador Graham Martin, who boarded the final regular lift of 19 helicopters that had flown out about two hours earlier.

After the last marines had left, hundreds of civilians swarmed into the compound and onto the roof. On the roof of a nearby building that had also served as an emergency helipad, several hundred civilians huddled together, hoping there would be more helicopters to carry them away….”

[**http://tv.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/saigon/evacuation.html**](http://tv.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/saigon/evacuation.html)